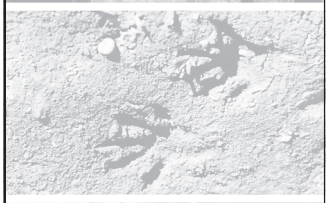
1. Objectives and Highlights






1. Objectives and Highlights

Plan Objectives

There were four major objectives of the West Eugene Wetlands Special Area Study:

1. To use the best information to help the community understand the choices available;
2. To find a balance between environmental protection and sound urban development which meets state and federal laws and regulations;
3. To provide opportunities for involvement of all interested segments of the community in Plan development; and
4. To turn a perceived "wetlands problem" into a "wetlands opportunity" for the community.

Plan Highlights

As suggested in the Preface and the above objectives, this Plan addresses wetlands and economic development as critical parts of a healthy, livable community. While the plan contains more detailed goals, policies, and recommended actions, the thrust of the Plan can be understood by reviewing the following highlights, the Wetland Designations Map (Map 3) and the Wetlands Conceptual Plan Map (Map 4).

Protection and Restoration of a Wetland and Waterway System

To implement existing federal and state wetland law and policy, the Plan designates the most valuable remaining wetlands for protection. Sites with large populations of rare plants are designated for protection. Almost all of the sites with remnants of the wet prairie grasslands with other important natural values are designated for protection within the west Eugene wetlands study area. Existing wetlands will be enhanced and areas restored where wetlands once existed. These areas and additional areas along stream courses will be used to form a connected wetland system creating greenways along Amazon Creek, Willow Creek, the A Channel (old Amazon Creek), and the A-3 Channel. This system will provide open space and scenic values in the west Eugene region. Buffering techniques will be used to protect wetlands from the effects of adjacent land uses.

Protection of Natural Diversity

By protecting a variety of wetlands, establishing protective buffers, creating and enhancing a variety of wetland types, managing them as a connected system, and linking them together, the community can enhance the natural diversity of west Eugene, an area which was neglected too often in the past. In the future, it will be rich in natural and cultural diversity.

Development Opportunities and Certainty

After many years of planning for urban uses and investing millions of dollars in public infrastructure facilities, the discovery of wetlands in west Eugene placed a cloud of uncertainty over future development opportunities. The Plan responds to this dilemma with recommendations that attempt to balance environmental and economic development values within the framework of federal and state wetland law. The Plan removes the cloud of uncertainty by recommending development on some wetlands while protecting others (see Map 3, Wetland Designations). Wetlands that are designated for development are frequently small, isolated and difficult to protect from already planned or developed urban uses. The Plan also recommends that the City seek a regional permit from the Army Corps of Engineers so that the administration of the permitting and mitigation process can occur at the local level, thus saving valuable time and resources.

Public comment during the preparation of the Plan and examples of new development adjacent to wetlands in other communities, tells us that citizens value living, working and shopping in areas that demonstrate attention to the surrounding landscape. Using this Plan, the community can focus its attention on designing future development in ways

Photo: Students at Amazon Creek, West Eugene.

that complement wetland areas, resulting in added value for both the development and the environment.

Wetland Protection Measures

The Plan calls for implementation of a number of wetland protection measures. The primary long term protection strategy is public or private nonprofit acquisition, coupled with a natural resource designation on the Metropolitan Plan and a natural resource zoning district that would prohibit development. Prior to acquisition, the existing federal and state wetland regulatory processes in conjunction with the policies in this plan will be the primary means for ensuring wetland protection. In addition to their existing review process, federal and state regulatory agencies will utilize this Plan's recommendations as guidelines when considering individual permit applications. The plan is aimed towards transferring, in part or in whole, the administration of state and federal wetland fill permitting processes to the City of Eugene, concurrent with or subsequent to, City adoption of other protection measures specified in this Plan. At that time, the City will have adopted other protection measures such as overlay zones, buffering requirements, and conservation easements.

A priority for implementing this Plan was the preparation and adoption of a waterside protection and development ordinance. This ordinance protects water quality and wildlife habitat of identified natural resource areas, allowing and encouraging development that is designed to enhance environmental values (see Appendix A, City of Eugene Implementing Ordinances).

Mitigation

Mitigation is the process used by federal and state agencies for determining whether wetlands may be developed (impacted) and, if so, under what conditions. The decision-making process is hierarchical where each level of criteria must be satisfied prior to proceeding to the next. The process is structured so that priority consideration is given to *avoiding* wetland impact. If it can be shown there is an unavoidable need to impact wetlands, the process then attempts to minimize the extent of the impact and sets out requirements to *compensate* for wetland losses in the form of enhancement, *restoration* or *creation* of wetland resources.

This Plan has conducted the mitigation analysis for the entire study area and concludes that the most effective way to achieve no net loss of wetland resources is to avoid impact. As a result, the majority of the wetland acres will be protected from impact through acquisition, comprehensive plan designations, zoning techniques and buffering requirements.

For the wetlands designated for development, the Plan requires compensation to occur at a minimum ratio of one acre of replacement for each acre of impact. Compensation is targeted for areas where the prospects for success are the highest, most beneficial to the ecological landscape and require little, if any, on-going maintenance. These areas are located on historic wetlands, disturbed agricultural wetlands and in areas adjacent to existing waterways. Enhancement and restoration, therefore, will be the primary methods for compensating for wetland losses. Mitigation efforts will concentrate on reestablishing historic wetland types and habitats that naturally occur in the area, while also creating opportunities for other wetland types such as marshes and ponds.

The Plan approaches mitigation in a comprehensive manner where resulting efforts not only satisfy federal and state wetland law but achieve other community needs and objectives such as providing additional flood control storage, water quality enhancement features, improved wildlife habitat and educational and recreational needs.

Mitigation and the Regional Mitigation Bank Concept

The Plan utilizes the wetland mitigation bank concept as the primary means for implementing the mitigation program. With this approach, mitigation efforts are planned as a whole where the most suitable sites are identified, acquired and restored in advance of wetland impact. This concept not only benefits the natural resource system by planning for the restoration of the Amazon Creek basin, but it also benefits the users of the bank - the development community. The bank system performs the mitigation requirements for individual users where the details of compensation are preplanned, constructed and maintained by a public or private nonprofit agency. To satisfy individual impact requirements, users simply have to buy mitigation credits from the bank, thus eliminating uncertainty and saving valuable time and resources. Because the bank is planned and developed as a whole, the details of mitigation can be incorporated into the existing environment, resulting in a more logical and natural system. The bank is designed to have sufficient capacity to serve the mitigation needs of the West Eugene Wetlands Plan Area and the community as a whole.

Stormwater Management

In 1993, the City of Eugene adopted the Comprehensive Stormwater Management Plan (CSWMP) that addresses the issues of flood control, water quality and natural resource management. This program includes management of the west Eugene wetlands system and focuses on the interrelationships among these components of Eugene's waterways and associated wetlands. The City of Eugene Public Works Department will use fewer piped storm sewers and will manage the open channels in ways to better balance stormwater and flood needs with environmental and wildlife habitat needs. The efforts will help reduce pollution and will make the waterways more pleasant urban open spaces.

Water Quality Improvements

Constructed wetlands and wetland improvements will be

used as biological filters to remove sediments, certain nutrients, and other water pollutants from the drainageways in west Eugene. In some instances, wetlands will be enhanced by providing more water to sites. The result will be cleaner surface waters, improved aquatic habitats, and a more pleasant water-oriented experience for those who live, work and visit west Eugene. While these wetlands may have multiple values, they will be managed for their primary use - stormwater treatment. The Comprehensive Stormwater Management Plan adopted in 1993 includes policies and best management practices to gain stormwater treatment benefits from the wetlands in west Eugene.

Improved Flood Control

By widening channels, protecting existing wetlands and creating new wetlands, additional flood storage capacity can be added in west Eugene. The widened channel bottoms will allow the low flow channels to meander among wetlands and for the reestablishment of stream bank habitat. This will reduce downstream impacts of storm runoff originating in the urban area. These flood storage improvements can often provide multiple benefits, such as wildlife habitat and recreation. Widening projects will be designed to protect and enhance adjacent wetlands. An example of this type of project is the Amazon Channel Enhancement (ACE) Project, which was completed in 1997. This project widened the channel of Amazon Creek within a 2.5 mile reach, and built a new bicycle and pedestrian path alongside the expanded channel. This project was paid for primarily by federal ISTEA (Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act) funds.

Improved Plant and Animal Habitats

Within the managed wetland system, large populations of rare plants will be protected. Experimentation on ways to increase populations of rare plants will occur through scientific research and demonstration projects. Also, the unique Willamette Valley prairie grassland plant community will be protected through creation of a wetland prairie reserve. By protecting and restoring a variety of wetland types, and by buffering natural areas from the impacts of nearby development, a diversity of habitats will be created; that diversity will benefit wildlife. The greenway corridor concept also benefits wildlife. Expanding existing natural systems and restoring habitat in areas that have been damaged by human activities insures better survival of wildlife and wildlife viewing opportunities. The greenway corridor concept also achieves this purpose.

Recreation, Education, and Research

Planned trails, bikeways, wildlife observation points and cleaner water within a diverse system of wetland types will provide numerous opportunities for public enjoyment of west Eugene environments. The wetland environment in west Eugene will become a favorite place to recreate and learn particularly when utilized by elementary, secondary and higher learning institutions in the community. Located near the University of Oregon, Oregon State University, Lane Community College, and other federal research laboratories, west Eugene will be the subject of further study over the coming decades. The possibility of a nature center devoted to west Eugene natural areas, including wetlands and the native American and early white settlement of the southern Willamette Valley, is currently being explored. Such a center will be designed to serve educational, recreational, and research needs.

Corridors and Connections

By creating greenways and trails along existing waterways, a connected system can be established via Amazon Creek from Spencer Butte to the edge of the west Eugene wetlands study area boundary. Via Willow Creek and the Amazon Park system, Amazon Creek can also be connected to the South Hills ridge line system. The Amazon waterway systems, like the Willamette and McKenzie Rivers, can become important natural corridors linking the community together.

Managing the System

The City of Eugene Public Works Department will assume the overall responsibility for managing and monitoring the west Eugene wetlands system with assistance from other departments. The role of the Public Works Department will expand to include natural resource management, stormwater quality and wetlands. Through staffing or contractual arrangements, the City will gain the expertise needed to manage the wetlands system. There are opportunities to work with environmental and community organizations, nonprofit environmental groups, and the private sector in order to protect and enhance west Eugene's natural environment. School children and other interested citizens can enjoy studying the environment while having a helping hand in improving it.

Financing Protection, Restoration, and Management

The City will continue to seek state and federal funds to acquire wetlands for protection, land for restoration and mitigation, and to pay for demonstration construction projects. Local funding sources will be focused on the construction of public improvements and the on-going operations, maintenance and monitoring of the system. Private funds will assist with acquisition and construction through the revolving funds of the mitigation bank program. Formation of a local land trust is another possible way to use private funds to assist the wetlands program. The funding solutions for west Eugene are likely to be diverse, and it is anticipated that acquisition and construction will take at least ten years or longer to complete. The acquisition and construction program is accompanied by priorities in map and list form (see Chapter 6, Maps 5 & 6) which will help in phasing Plan implementation over time as funding allows. A steady, local revenue source is recommended for the on-going management program. The wetlands management program will continue to be coordinated with the appropriate state, federal, and local agencies.